DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 117 203 95 UD 015 588

AUTHOR Condon,E.C.
TITLE Introduction to Culture and General Problems of Cultural Interference in Communication. Reference Pamphlets on Intercultural Communications, No.1. Human Relations in Cultural Context, Series C: Teacher Training Materials.
INSTITUTION Rutgers, The State Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. Graduate School of Education.
SPONS AGENCY New Jersey State Dept. of Education, Trenton. Office of Adult Basic Education.; Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 74
GRANT OEG-0-72-1442
NOTE 29p.;this document is available only in microfiche due to reproduction restriction by the publisher
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EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Anglo Americans; *Communication Problems; Cultural Awareness; Cultural Background; Cultural Differences; Cultural Factors; Cultural Images; *Cultural Traits; *Culture Conflict; Culture Contact; Ethnic Groups; *Ethnocentrism; French; *Role Perception; Spanish Speaking

ABSTRACT

From an individual's viewpoint, it is argued, culture establishes a meaningful context of social institutions, ecological practices, and personal rules of conduct which provide each group member with a blueprint for social existence. But, behavior is also conditioned by unconscious internalized patterns, which tend to be accepted by everyone as normal facets of "human nature", thereby originating the false premise on which so much crosscultural miscommunication is based--the belief that behavioral deviance must be contrary to nature. Men who live and work in the same community tend to develop certain common features. In the area of intercultural relations the importance of assessing accurately this elusive, but powerful, activator of human behavior cannot be overemphasized. Misunderstandings between members of different societies are apt to occur as a result of the speakers' compulation to communicate with each other through different viewpoints based on variant mental models of reality. If a Frenchman may be seen as cognitive-oriented, for example, and if an American may be characterized as psychomotor-oriented, then a Spanish speaking individual must be depicted as affective-oriented. One may easily predict that any confrontation between members of these three cultures is apt to generate a host of misunderstandings. (Author/JM)

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Excerpt No. 1: Introduction to Culture and General Problems of Cultural Interference in Communication

E.C. Condon

"The project reported herein was performed pursuant to Grant Number OEG-0-72-1442 from the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare to Montclair State College, and is the result of a contract with Rutgers University for specific services to be performed under said grant in accordance with the New Jersey State Department of Education plan for staff development under the HEW Region II Adult Continuing Education Staff Development Program. The opinions expressed herein, however, do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Office of Education: and no official endorsement by the U.S. Office of Education should be inferred."

ED 015 588

ED117203

HUMAN RELATIONS IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

Series C

Teacher Training Materials

Reference Pamphlets on

Intercultural Communication No. 1

Prepared by:

E. C. Condon, Director
Language Culture Institute
Rutgers Graduate School of Education
New Jersey 1973

HEW Region II
Staff Development Project
Montclair State College
New Jersey

In cooperation with New Jersey
State Department of Education
Division of Field Services
Bureau of Adult Continuing Education
Office of Adult Basic Education

Subcontracted to Rutgers University

UD 015 588

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EXCERPT 1

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURE AND GENERAL PROBLEMS OF CULTURAL INTERFERENCE IN COMMUNICATION

Culture - Its Nature and Complexity

Definition of Culture

Rabindranath Tagore once said that man without culture would be as meaningless as a violin without strings, but the reverse is equally true. There can be no meaningful culture without human beings, and no useful violin strings detached from the appropriate musical instrument. Actually, the relationship between the collective way of life of a society and the individual behavior of its members is so complex, that it has been described in many ways over the years. Even today, experts in various disciplines fail to agree upon a definition acceptable to all.

Clyde Kluckhohn and William H. Kelly agree that culture possesses an historical dimension and that it weaves together common patterns of existence (both overt and covert) for members of a particular group.[1]

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[1] Clyde Kluckhohn and William H. Kelly, "The Concept of Culture," The Science of Man in the World Crisis, Ralph Linton (Ed.) (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 78-107.

Sir Edward B. Tylor, founder of modern anthropology, refers to it as an agglomeration of all human accomplishments within a society.[1]

Edward Sapir relates culture to language; according to him, the former determines the contents of human actions and thoughts, while the latter formulates them.[2]

As one may notice readily from the above comments from three renowned scholars, the problem of conceptual variance on the subject of "culture" has hardly lessened in the past twenty years which have elapsed since Talcott Parsons pointed it out in one of his works.[3] In fact, this particular sociological area seems to have undergone a significant change of orientation in the use and interpretation of such terms as "civilization" and "culture," after World War II. As Kroeber and Kluckhohn point out, most of the definitions of culture, prior to 1940, emphasize the historical significance of civilizations, while the more recent ones tend to

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[1] Edward B. Tylor, Primitive Culture (London, England: Murray, Third Edition, 1891), p. 1.

[2] Edward Sapir, Culture, Language and Personality (California: University of California Press, 1949), p. 178.

[3] Talcott Parsons, The Social System (New York: The Free Press, 1951), p. 15.

stress their behavioral and psychological characters.[1] Lately, the anthropological trend toward actuality of information and away from chronological development has been correspondingly reflected, at least theoretically, in the content of language-oriented programs -- bilingual· foreign, and English as a Second Language education. In these particular areas, a knowledge of historical developments is indeed less relevant to intercultural understanding than familiarity with daily aspects of the contemporary native way of life, such as norms, standards of behavior and the like. Under the circumstances, the educational definition of culture, adopted by Nelson Brooks seems to be the most sensible to accept, along with his proposed differentiated categories of "formal" and "deep" cultures: culture, as the sum total of human achievements and designs for living in a particular society· formal culture, as concrete facts of civilization: deep culture, as explicit and implicity factors of human interaction.[2]

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1 Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions (Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology, XLVII) (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1952), pp. 153-154.

2 Nelson Brooks, "Culture and Language Instruction," Teacher's Notebook in Modern Foreign Languages (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 4.

The Role of Culture

The separation of concrete facts of civilization from the less tangible sets of beliefs, attitudes and values characteristic of a given society, is a purely arbitrary but convenient system of organization, which facilitates the examination of a nation's way of life. This classification is artificial because, as a structure, culture is more than the sum of its parts: it is a system of integrated patterns, most of which remain below the threshold of consciousness, yet all of which govern human behavior just as surely as the manipulated strings of a puppet control its motions. As an agent of conformity, the role of culture is to establish the general limits of socially permissible actions and, therefore, to restrict individual activities externally (through laws and other formal sanctions), while allowing a certain freedom of choice for the development of each man's personality (career selection, for example). Within this general framework, however, there exists some diversity. Some cultural features are universal, others present alternatives, and a few remain specialities. In the United States, for instance, everyone consumes food (a universal feature), but not necessarily the same kind at every meal (an alternative) · yet, the possibility of eating caviar does not present itself to many people (a specialty). Another

important type of cultural variation is provided by the diversity of human adaptation to the external changes occurring in the geographical and social environments, or arising from the biological and psychological needs of individuals.

The mere fact that no society exists without a culture provides a clue to its raison d'etre, which is to fulfill certain biological and psychological needs in human beings. Apparently, man is compelled to think and behave as a taxonomist by the bewildering confusion of the objective world; thus he is driven to organize the apparently chaotic environment in which he must live, according to some logical scheme. But, since the raw materials of physical nature and human thought are subject to considerable variations (geographical factors and individual differences), their combinations yield infinitely diverse conceptual networks of reality. Each of these mental constructs results in the modus vivendi which is called "a culture." Despite their tangible differences, such patterns for living possess universal characteristics: they originate in the human mind; they facilitate human and environmental interactions; they satisfy basic human needs; they are cumulative and adjust to changes in external and internal conditions; they tend to form a

consistent structure; they are learned and shared by all the members of a society; and they are transmitted to new generations.[1]

Ethnocentrism - A By-Product of Culture

From an individual's viewpoint, culture establishes a meaningful context of social institutions, ecological practices and personal rules of conduct which provide each group member with a blueprint for social existence. But, the latter's behavior is also conditioned by internalized patterns which are buried in the depth of the unconscious, and which control his thought and speech patterns, his perceptual, conceptual and motor habits, and even his emotional responses. These traits are so much a part of every human being that they tend to be accepted by everyone as normal facets of "human nature," thereby originating the false premise on which so much crosscultural mis-communication is based -- the belief that behavioral deviance must be contrary to nature.

Out of this unconscious ethnocentrism grows a number of preconceived notions about life in other countries, which are not always conducive to international understanding. A standard,

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1 George Peter Murdock, "The Cross-Cultural Survey," Readings in Cross Cultures, Frank W. Moore (ed.)(HRAF Press, New Haven, 1961), pp. 45-54.

stereotyped American impression of France's légèreté, for instance, may be adequately summarized by the anti-slogan "Air France, Air chance;" and, conversely, a typical Frech cliché concerning the United States' "strange" way of life conjures the inevitable symbols of gratte-ciel, chewing gum, and gun-toting cow-boys.

This instinctive reaction toward the unfamiliar accounts also for the traumatic experience of travelers, or immigrants who suffer from culture shock when their cherished misconceptions stand in the way of their adjustment to a new world of reality. For such people, the process of acculturation is so exacting, that its effect on the psyche may be envisioned as the sort of sensation one would experience when crossing into another time dimension, where all the signposts of ordinary behavior are distorted. Quite appropriately, the French call this disorientation of social response le depaysement, which means literally the stripping away of one's homeland "culturation," and its resulting feeling of being "lost." The absence of a similar term in the non-technical lexicon of the English language might be taken as a significant revelation of Anglo-Saxon indifferen toward cultural matters, since the vocabulary blanks of a language are said to represent "unnecessary" information in the eyes of the speakers. Certainly, evidence in support of this view may be readil

found in the neglected cultural aspects of language teaching in the average American classroom today, whether it be at the elementary, secondary, or adult education level.

National Character

Men who live and work in the same community tend to develop certain common features which are sometimes referred to as "social characters." These unique traits which form what may be called the collective personality of a culture, become evident only when they are examined in contrast with the behavioral characteristics of another community. Their existence is not uniformly recognized by everyone, a fact which may, perhaps, be attributed to the effect of varying ethnocentric interference with the objectivity of cultural assessments. While certain writers consider the concept of national character highly problematic in nature, others such as David M. Potter uphold it as a verifiable fact, traceable in countless societies.[1] The presence of such an entity is supported, for instance, by the findings of Franz M. Joseph who assembled the reports of twenty foreign observers on the characteristics of life

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1 David M. Potter, People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and t American Character (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1954) p. 57.

in the United States: all stated opinions concurred on the identification of certain "national predispositions" as typically American.[2] It is also acknowledged in various general definitions, offered by such authorities as Clyde Kluckhohn, Salvador de Madariaga, Geoffrey Gorer, and Don Martindale, who treat national character as shared characterizations, predispositions or traits sometimes referred to as world-view or Weltanschauung which are manifested by members of an ethnic group.

Additional supportive evidence justifying the existence of national character may be found in the works of twentieth century scholars, such as Ruth Benedict who analyzed Japanese psychology in her book, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword, H.C.F.Duijker and N.H.Frijda who prepared a report on trends concerning National Character and National Stereotypes for the International Union of Scientific Psychology in 1961, Robert Hunt who wrote a history of anthropological studies of national character, and countless others who have published articles on the subject.

In reviewing the various statements made concerning this elusive concept, one discovers a dual aspect in national character:

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[1]Washington Platt, National Character in Action: Intelligence Factors in Foreign Relations (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), p. 112.

the unconscious level of collectively shared attitudes toward reality and society, and their reflection in concrete behavioral manifestations. In basing their studies of ethnic differences upon these external characteristics, many scholars have failed to note that such attributes may be temporary (in response to prevalent conditions and that their presence in group members is only probable, not certain. This may account for the existence of divided opinions among experts, concerning the predictability of national behavior. These variations are hardly surprising, in view of the fact that most of the evidence gathered on this subject so far is based consistently upon observable data, in other words upon the overt actions and conscious verbalizations of individuals who are members of a designated society. And, one must remember that hard facts on human activities are not necessarily perceived, collected and interpreted in the same manner by different witnesses who, despite commendable efforts to achieve objectivity, cannot entirely succeed in rejecting the shackles of cultural conditioning or in overcoming the effect of unsuspected personal biases. Furthermore, even observable evidence does not suffice to explain the peculiar mixture of elements which constitute a collective personality. After all, every man is endowed with three sets of qualities: the identical attributes

of a common generic origin which are present in everyone, the imprint of a specific social and physical endowment which is shared by members of a community, and the individual traits which set each person apart from all other beings. There is no way for an outside observer to determine in what proportion the culturally conditioned part of human nature may be held accountable for an action, nor is there any possibility for this witness to dissociate himself from his own national and personal tendencies. Consequently, no crosscultural judgement may be considered entirely objective or scientifically reliable. As far as human beings are c concerned, neither reason nor intellect alone will be able to provide an adequate basis on which to evaluate a collective psychology; empat[illegible] is also needed, that is to say an intuitive knowledge of another way of living, thinking and speaking.

Yet, in the area of intercultural relations, the importance of assessing accurately this elusive, but powerful activator of human behavior cannot be over-emphasized. In times of war, the force of national character has even been known to reverse the course of normally predicted events -- calculated on the basis of such incontrovertible data as quantities of munitions, military equipment, and army personnel. This very situation occurred in

World War II, when the German intelligence produced an accurate and damning report on the devastated state of British defences, but failed to take into account the steely determination of the population to fight for their country down to the last man. On the strength of this information, the Wehrmacht command waited confidently for the "inevitable" surrender of a helpless enemy. But the message never came, and the British refusal to capitulate in the face of apparently staggering odds led German generals to suspect the existence of secret reserves in England and to formulate new plans which, based as they were on false psychological premises, resulted in the eventual collapse of the Nazi machinery.

What happens in times of war at an international level, occurs also in any situation where intercultural stress conditions exist. This was the case with the racial riots which occurred in New York and other large American cities a few years ago, and arose from an exacerbation of frictions between two cultural groups, caused by mutual misunderstandings. Such problems are not likely to be eliminated, unless the leaders of each group begin to take into consideration the intangible factors of cultural conditioning before making decisions affecting interracial or interethnic relationships.

Differences in Perception of Reality

Every society today needs practice in learning to view the world "created" by man, with greater flexibility than they have in the past. Despite increased opportunities for world travel and communication, every man still retains a tendency to believe in the existence of a single reality, his reality, whereas actually, different societies do inhabit different orders of reality, each of them determined by a specific cultural heritage. The external world is extremely complex but, between each individual and the physical objects and events of the universe, there occurs a phenomenon called perception which filters the information gathered by the senses before it reaches the brain, thus resulting in a selective form of consciousness. Several mental processes occur at that time; some of them are spontaneous, and others must be learned. Therefore, perception may be seen as a reaction of the human organism to the external environment, but a reaction which is also conditioned by life experiences. Because individuals are not conscious of the extent to which the world they perceive is influenced by what they have learned in the course of their existence, misunderstandings are apt to occur between members of different societies, even when they use the same language. Such difficulties occur as a result

of the speakers' compulsion to communicate with each other through different viewpoints based on variant mental models of reality. Several examples of divergent perceptions on everyday matters are provided in Table I, which illustrates contrasts in the French and American outlooks on food, distances, and family relationships.

From a surface viewpoint, cultural reality may be seen as a conglomeration of arbitrary facts subject to environmental conditions, and learned by all members in a given group. However, a deeper level analysis will reveal, beneath these superficial characteristics, the hidden orientation system which determines the nature and direction of human perception in each society. Among the items listed on Table I, for instance, differences in food and non-food categories may be mostly ascribed to variances in ecological surroundings (availability of certain things, absence of others) and in individual selection (acceptance of certain foods, rejection of others). But in the case of attitudes toward travel distances and family relationships, one must look beyond the outer level of surface behavior to find an explanation for cultural divergences. Thus a Frenchman's tendency toward geographical inertia and paternal authoritarianism stands as a natural expression of the characteristic static centralism of his native world-view, in the same way that the American's

TABLE I

DISCREPANCY IN FRENCH AND AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY

French Perception		American Perception
	1. FOOD	
	Breakfast	
Tartines, (or) Petits pains, (or) Croissants, (with) Cafe au lait.		Toast, or Cereals, or Eggs and bacon, with Coffee, and fruit juice.
	Rabbit	
Meat fit for Human Consumption		Mostly non-food; eaten by foreigners.
	Corn	
Chicken feed.		Vegetable fit for Human Consumption.
	2. DISTANCES	
	60 miles	
A considerable travel distance		An easy jaunt
	300 miles	
A major trip requiring careful planning.		A respectable distance, easily covered in a day.
	3. FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS	
	Family	
Extended family ties. A closely knit unit.		Nuclear family ties. A loosely woven unit.
	Husband	
Uncontested master of household.		A partner in marriage.
	Wife	
Dependent upon husband (legally and otherwise)		A partner in marriage.
	Children	
Considered basically wicked. Strict supervision.		Considered basically good. Permissive upbringing.

predilection for geographical mobility and democratic equality actualizes the dynamic diffusion of his own Weltanschauung. These basic orientations to reality are so ingrained in members of a society, that they become externalized in all their actions. A study made by Martha Wolfenstein some years ago on children's drawings, revealed that a French child tends to portray a static world by means of a still picture of someone standing or sitting, which he surrounds with a boundary line; while an American boy or girl, on the other hand, is more likely to depict a world in motion by drawing human figures in mid action and extending lines right to the edge of the page -- presumably continuing beyond it.[1] In this candid interpretation of the environment, the essential differences between the French and American ways of looking at man and his world may be easily recognized: for the former, man at the center of a defined reality; for the latter, man in action, unrestricted by his environment.

Physical reality does exist outside of man's perception, but the concept of "reality" which is universally applied to it is

[1]Martha Wolfenstein, "French Children's Paintings," Martha Mead and Martha Wolfenstein, Childhood in Contemporary Cultures (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 300-305.

misleading, for knowledge of the external world and events comes to man indirectly, through his senses and through mediating psychological processes. The manner in which he apprehends the universe is determined in part by the behavioral heritage of his society -- his cultural background -- and by the accumulated learning resulting from his own individual experiences. Thus, the meaningful universe in which each human being exists is not a universal reality, but "a category of reality" consisting of selectively organized features considered significant by the society in which he lives. This mental model of the external world varies along general lines from culture to culture, and in specific details from individual to individual. For instance, uneducated desert tribes have no concept of snow because it is an element unknown to their native habitat; and, while all Americans understand the concept of breakfast, to one person it may mean bacon and eggs, to another cereals -- a matter of personal choice among available food.

The question of how perception came to be shaped in different ways by different human groups, with the ultimate result of creating different cultures, will probably never be solved; it is somewhat like asking what came first, the chicken or the egg. What is more important for the sake of intercultural relations in this country,

is to discover the general principle which determines today the format of perception for each major language community represented in the United States.

American, French, and Hispanic World-Views

Since presumably each human being is born with the same basic physical features, the possibility of divergent world-views resulting from variations in sensory equipment can be eliminated. Consequently, it is logical to assume that discrepancies in world apprehension must occur on the level of mental processes and that, at some point, the human computer-brain must have been collectively and differentially programed in each society. It is precisely at this level that crosscultural communication is short-circuited by variances in thinking patterns, in other words, by differences in ways of collecting and organizing data on external reality into a systematic cognitive model.

The French World-View

The Frenchman's universe is individually man-centered. From this primary location in time and space, he controls that portion of the universe which is placed within his reach. In his role as the center of a physical universe which, without him, would have no

conceptual reality, man's most important attribute is that portion of his being which differentiates him from everything else on earth -- his intellect. By virtue of his reasoning ability and his central position in the environment, man sets out to "know" his universe by discovering the laws which govern the environment, and by assigning to them a reality equal, if not superior to, that of the physical world. Thereafter, he solves every problem by referring to those stated principles. A predilection for this universalistic method of cognition still persists in French schools, despite educational reforms. First, the teacher explains the rule, then the students are expected to apply it to specific examples. The whole process can be carried out entirely on the theoretical level, without real need for concrete proof, for ideas are the essence -- the true reality -- of physical existence.

In recapitulation, then, the tenor of the French way of life may be characterized as primarily cognitive, static and centralized in overall world orientation, with a predominance of universalistic modes of reasoning.

The American World-View

Instead of acting like the Frenchman as the stabilizing center of a universe which he controls within predetermined limitations,

the American tends to visualize his role as that of one agent in motion among many others, whose collective duty it is to modify societal behavior in order to conquer a constantly changing world. Each man sets no limits to his influence, since he knows that tomorrow's conditions may enable him to do what looks impossible today; thus, the American behaves as a pragmatist who believes in concrete action, and lives mainly for the future, while enjoying the present, and ignoring most of the past. As a corollary of his pragmatic orientation and predilection for change and adaptation, he tends to accept general principles as convenient categories invented by the human mind, but subject to change in response to an evolving environment, and to verification by pragmatic experience. Under these conditions he see each new problem as a test of a major concept which he either verifies or disproves through practical application. This nominalistic reasoning process goes from the particular to the general, since man cannot trust the rules he has invented, but must instead strive to match his thinking with the evolutionary process of a universe which he must conquer anew every day.

Generally speaking, then the American life style may be visualized as essentially psychomotor, dynamic and diffuse in orientation

The Hispanic World-View

Individuals steeped in the Hispanic tradition see themselves as mere links in the chain of human-environmental reaction; consequently, they make little effort to shape or conquer a universe which, they believe, carries them relentlessly toward an unknown destiny. In this view of the world, man copes with daily existence by merely reacting to each situation and accepting each moment as it comes on the continuum of time and space. Since both of these dimensions are considered to be entirely beyond human control in the Hispanic Weltanschauung, they tend to lose part of their physical meaning while gaining a more personalized outlook related to the activities of mankind. For the Spanish, the places and moments of interpersonal relations are more significant than others, simply because they become infused with the essence of humanity -- being and interacting with each other.

As far as mental activities are concerned, Spanish reasoning habits may be classified as intuitional, a thinking process which relies upon insights into existing relationships -- both collective and individual to reach proper conclusions. Under these conditions, a problem must be solved by grasping the interassociations of its components and the common affinity which hold them together. For

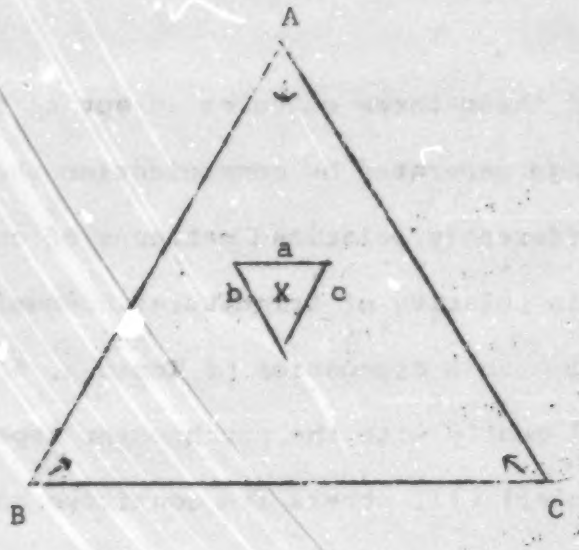
this purpose, the quality of mind needed to achieve this level of understanding is imagination, rather than intellect or know-how. Ina 11, then, Spanish culture may be summarized as predominantly affective, passive and relational in orientation. How these characteristics stand in contrast with those of French and American world-views can be more clearly understood from the comparative outline listed below.

American Orientation In Time and Space	French Orientation In Time and Space	Spanish Orientation In Time and Space
Psychomotor	Cognitive	Affective
Dynamic	Static	Passive
Diffuse	Centralized	Relational
Nominalistic	Universalistic	Intuitive

Interference in Cross-Cultural Communication

If a Frenchman may be seen as cognitive-oriented, and his behavior as governed by the law of static centralism, and if an American may be characterized as psychomotor-oriented, and his behavior as controlled by the principle of dynamic diffusion, then a Spanish speaking individual must be depicted as affective-oriented, and his behavior as determined by the rule of passive relationalism. Under the circumstances, one may easily predict that any confrontatic

between members of these three cultures is apt to generate a host of misunderstandings generated by communication short-circuits originating in differently polarized patterns of cultural thought and behavior. This polarity of tricultural communication is illustrated on Figure 1: in a discussion of Topic X, A (the American speaker) will deal mostly with the psychomotor aspect of the subject, B (the French speaker) will stress its cognitive aspect, and C (the Spanish speaker) will emphasize its affective aspect. In this situation, each individual behaves "naturally," that is to say in a manner consistent with the world-view of his native culture. Thus, he addresses himself to that facet of physical reality which he has been conditioned to see and tends to minimize all other aspects ... those very aspects which are held important by his interlocutors! Consequently, a three - way communication breakdown occurs, with each person blaming the others for their lack of understanding, when actually the problem arises from a factor external to the speakers -- the restricted area of cultural meaning common to the interlocutors (See Figure 1).

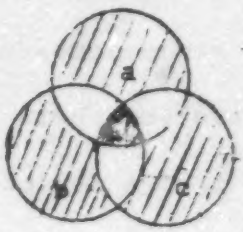


Tripolar Communication

A: American Speaker
B: French Speaker
C: Spanish Speaker

X: Topic of Communication

a: Psychomotor Aspect of X
b: Cognitive Aspect of X
c: Affective Aspect of X



a: Psychomotor Focus of X
b: Cognitive Focus of X
c: Affective Focus of X

: Triculturally common areas
: Biculturally common areas
: Monocultural areas

FIGURE 1
Polarity of Tricultural Communication

Even on a more general level, tri-cultural interaction suffers from interferences created by divergences in cultural conditioning which cause each individual to consider all unfamiliar forms of behavior as "abnormal." For instance, to a European or a South American, the overall impression created by American culture is that of a frantic, perpetual round of actions which leave practically no time for personal feeling and reflection. But, to an American, the reasonable and orderly tempo of French life conveys a sense of hopeless backwardness and ineffectuality, and the leisurely timelessness of Spanish activities represents an appalling waste of time and human potential. And, to a Spanish speaker, the methodical essence of planned change in France may seem cold-blooded, just as much as his own proclivity toward spur-of-the-moment decisions may strike his French counterpart as recklessly irresponsible.

These conflicting views may be interpreted as a reflection of ethnocentric attitudes, but what they truly express is the inevitable feeling of disorientation which affects an individual who crosses the boundaries of his life environment into the new conceptual dimensions of another culture and finds his judgement affected by the pressures of differently conceived time and space. Wherever divergent world-views come into contact, problems will occur: even the most rational of man must lose his powers of objectivity when he finds himself deprived of a familiar sense of direction.